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SUBJECT: BLUE HOUSE SENIOR SECRETARIES ANNOUNCED

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: On February 10, the Presidential Transition Committee announced the lineup for the Blue House Senior Secretaries. Notably, GNP lawmaker Park Jae-wan was named

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Senior Presidential Secretary for Political Affairs, and Korea University Professor Kim Byung-kook Senior Secretary for Foreign Affairs and National Security. The new lineup features academics; six out of the eight earned their doctoral degrees from U.S. universities; four are currently professors; the two lawmakers named previously were professors. President-elect Lee emphasized their professional ability and dedication, but other political parties remain critical of the apparent regional and personal favoritism. However, particular criticism of those named has been light. The group is relatively young and will likely play a coordinating more than policy-making role. Regardless, their strong ties to the U.S. and their proximity to the President mean that most of President Lee's foreign policies will likely be made with a good understanding of the U.S. END SUMMARY.

OVERVIEW

12. (SBU) President-elect Lee Myung-bak named seven senior presidential secretaries and the spokesman for the Presidential Office, Cheong Wa Dae. As part of Lee Myung-bak's plan to streamline government, the senior secretaries have assistant minister rather than minister

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status as in the past. Among the seven named, five have degrees from Ivy League universities, including Harvard, Pennsylvania, and Cornell, while the other two are graduates of Vanderbilt and Michigan. In Roh Moo-hyun's first Blue House, among the ten senior secretaries, two received PhDs from U.S. schools.

13. (SBU) Except for the senior secretary for civil affairs, former Chief of the Seoul High Prosecutors' Office, Lee excluded bureaucrats from the list. He favored graduates of his alma mater, as two of the seven are graduates of Korea University and one is currently a professor there. Two are in their 60s, two in the early 50s and four in their late 40s. Given their relative youth and lower bureaucratic

status, the Blue House Secretariat will subordinate themselves to cabinet ministers, according to contacts in the Transition Team.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS CHIEF: KIM, BYUNG-KOOK

14. (SBU) Korea University Professor Kim Byung-kook was chosen as the Senior Presidential Secretary for Foreign and Security Affairs (under Roh this was the position occupied by the National Security Advisor and had minister-level status). Kim, 49, comes from an elite background; his extended family owns Dong-a Ilbo group, which includes Korea University. He attended Phillips Andover Academy, and earned his B.A. in economics, and M.A. and Ph.D. in political science from Harvard. Since 1990, he has taught political science at Korea University. He founded and has served as Director of the East Asia Institute (EAI) since 2002, a non-governmental, non-profit entity dedicated to studying the dynamics of East Asia in a complex transformational era. Kim apparently reflects President-elect Lee's strong emphasis on solidifying the U.S.-ROK Alliance, but some have criticized Kim's lack of practical experience.

POLITICAL CHIEF: PARK, JAE-WAN

15. Rep. Park (also Bahk) Jae-wan of the Grand National Party (GNP) was named Senior Secretary for Political Affairs. Born in Masan, South Gyeongsang Province, in 1955, Bahk has served as a GNP proportional representative since 2004 after teaching political science at Sungkyunkwan University. He earned his BA in economics at Seoul National University and PhD in public policy at Harvard. With a varied background in the Cabinet, the Blue House, academia, and the political circle, Park's main task is to bridge the gap between the presidential office, the Cabinet, and political parties.

THE REST

16. (SBU) Kim Choong-soo, president of Hallym University, was named Senior Secretary for Economic Affairs. Kim, 60, worked as president of the Korea Development Institute (KDI), a state-funded think tank, between 2002 and 2005 after serving as a presidential aide for economic policy in 1993. He was a key player in Korea's accession to the OECD in 1996. Park Mee-sok, a professor at Sookmyung Women's University, was named Senior Secretary for Social Affairs. Park, 49, has long been acquainted with the President-elect, including her service as an aide when Lee was Seoul Mayor. She also attends the same church as Lee.

17. (SBU) Kwak Seung-jun, 47, an economics professor at Korea University, was named Senior Secretary for National Policy Planning. Kwak was born in North Gyeongsang Province and graduated from the economics department of Korea University, has been serving Lee since his days as Mayor of Seoul. He has been one of the key architects of many of the President-elect's policy pledges, including the grand canal project. Kwak was widely acknowledged during the campaign as the professor with the most access to Lee Myung-bak. Proportional GNP representative Lee Joo-ho was designated as Senior Secretary for Education, Science and Cultural Affairs. Born in Daegu in 1961, Rep. Lee is considered an education expert though his recent proposals to revamp the English education system have come under fire.

18. (SBU) Lee Jong-chan, former Chief of the Seoul High Prosecutors' Office, was appointed as Senior Secretary for Civil Affairs. The 61-year-old lawyer was born in Goseong, South Gyeongsang Province, and has assisted the President-elect in defending against the BBK scandal. Finally, Lee Dong-kwan, 50, spokesman of the Presidential Transition Committee, was named spokesman of Cheong Wa Dae.

The spokesman, who served as an editorial writer for the Dong-A Ilbo newspaper before joining the Lee camp last year, will double as Senior Secretary for Public Relations.

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